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ABSTRACT

During the spring of 1972, Educational Testing Service joined with the California State Legislature's Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education to engage in a study of 116 California State institutions, of which 69 were public community colleges. One purpose was to study the goals of the institutions. Using the IGI--Institutional Goals Inventory--students, faculty members, and administrators were asked to respond to a series of statements concerning "what is" and "what should be" the goals of these colleges. The results are summarized in this speech, which also includes a rationale for the study and a brief statistical history of the growth of community colleges since 1900. (Author/SGM)

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Student Reactions to College[1]

The development and growth of community and junior colleges has been characterized as "one of the few and unique accomplishments of American education in the twentieth century."[2] From 1900, when only eight junior colleges existed in the United States, with a total enrollment of fewer than 100, to 1972, the number of colleges increased to over 1,100, with a total enrollment of slightly fewer than 3 million students. In the 1960-70 decade, five hundred new colleges were created, and student enrollment increased almost fivefold. In 1971, the Carnegie Commission estimated a need for 175 to 235 new community colleges by 1980, and also suggested the need for 80,000 new and replacement faculty needed in community colleges by that date.

In Canada, I understand there are 143 postsecondary non-degree granting institutions. In 1971 to 1972 there were 149,849 students and in 1972-73, 250,403 students, presenting an expanding picture. There has been a 60 per cent increase in the last ten years and 15 to 20 institutions will open in the next 5 years. Throughout the world, one new college opened each day and there are approximately 5,000 two-year colleges.

In the United States, at least, the educational horizon became a bit murkier in 1974. Values unchallenged for decades were now under scrutiny,

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1. Address prepared by Walter T. Schoen, Jr. and presented by Jonathan R. Warren at the International Institute on the Community College, Lambton College, Sarnia, Ontario, June 11, 1974.

2. Cohen, Arthur. A Constant Variable. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971.

students and parents differed in their judgments about the value of college attendance, many private colleges and universities found themselves in serious financial difficulties. Postsecondary institutions found themselves, depending on one's perspective, either overbuilt or underutilized, and recruiting procedures often took on the aura of salesmanship. In the words of Edmund Gleazer of AACJC, the climate in the seventies is "less conducive to basking," "community colleges now exist in a far more competitive environment than that of the sixties," and "fast becoming a golden memory is the exhilarating growth period with its built-in forgiveness features for mistakes in judgment and ineffective performance." In short, the boom was over. This "new and different period" calls for a response from junior and community colleges different from the first two periods of their development. Given this background of initial gradual evolution, then frenetic expansion, Gleazer concludes that in the United States, "obviously our plans cannot be based on the experience and data of the sixties."

There are some apparent inconsistencies, however, in this picture. In a survey of a nationally representative sample of adults conducted last year by Educational Testing Service, 80% of the respondents between the ages of 18 and 60 said they were interested in learning more about some subject, while nearly one-third had actually become involved in some kind of formal learning experience during the past year.[3] The trend in the United States seems to be away from direct entrance to college from high school (the percentage of male high school graduates entering directly dropped from 63% in 1968 to 53% in 1972 (Ann Young, Monthly Labor Review, June 1973). The Carp-

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3. Carp, A; Peterson, R.; & Roelfs, P. Adult Learning Interests and Experiences. In K. P. Cross & J. R. Valley: Planning Non-Traditional Programs. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Peterson-Roelfs study suggests that there are 14 million adults in the United States interested in college-level enrollment.

The point is, as Pat Cross has so aptly put it, that "open admissions and a national network of public community colleges have opened the doors of postsecondary education; we now have new kinds of students with new needs on our doorstep and we aren't quite sure that we know what to do with them...these are students who are not prepared to undertake traditional college study...students differ in consistent and significant ways from the students that higher education has served in the past. They differ in interests, abilities, and expectations from traditional college students." (Cross, Serving the New Clientele for Post-secondary Education.)

During the spring of 1972, Educational Testing Service joined with the California State Legislature's Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education to engage in a study of 116 California state institutions, of which 69 were public community colleges, one purpose of which was to study the goals of the institutions. Using the IGI--Institutional Goals Inventory--students, faculty members, administrators were asked to respond to a series of statements concerning "what is" and "what should be" the goals of these colleges? The students agreed that the top three goals should be:

1. Vocational preparation--offering specific occupational curricula and programs geared to emerging career fields, retraining or upgrading of skills, assistance to students in careers plans.

2. Community--the creation and maintenance of a climate in which there is a faculty commitment to the general welfare of the institution, open and candid communication, open and amicable airing of differences, and mutual trust and respect among students, faculty, and administrators.

3. Individual Personal Development--defined as identification by students of personal goals and development of means for achieving them, and enhancement of sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

A coordinate section of the study asked other groups to respond to the same list. Faculty, administrators, the governing board, and representatives of the local community cited these identical goals, although not always in the same order as the top three "should be" goals cited by students. According to Cross, "A college with these goals would look something like this if we tried to capture its flavor from the IGI goals statement: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation, the community colleges would concentrate in helping students decide upon personal and vocational goals and would provide specific occupational training as well as opportunities for self-exploration and the development of self-confidence and interpersonal skills."

In this instance, each of the constituent groups agreed that the top three institutional goals should be vocational preparation, individual and personal development, and community.

In contrast, the University of California administrators agreed with the faculty on two of the three goals, with undergraduates on two of the three and with graduate students on two of the three, with the Regents (who failed to include "intellectual orientation"among their top three goal priorities) on two of three, and with the local community on two of the three.

Faculty agreed with undergraduates on two of three, on one of three with the Regents, and on all three with the community.

Let me emphasize the purpose of this exercise. I think few would deny that the necessity for some agreement concerning the priorities to be given each institutional goal is a critical issue for any institution. More important, however, is the identification of those goals and the comparison of the beliefs of each constituent group. The process is at least as important as the outcome. In addition to identifying goals, we need to be aware of how students perceive their educational experiences.

This brings me to the heart of what I would like to discuss today: the student as consumer. As we think about serving the new clientele, we need to be aware of student reactions to their educational experience. To approach this question from a pragmatic point of view, we should be aware that in a world of competing demands or options for learners, we must address ourselves not so much with concerns of the institution but with the needs of the consumer. From this pragmatic point of view, our survival depends on it.

More importantly, from the pedagogical-philosophical viewpoint, we need to do this because we exist only because students exist and we have an obligation which transcends all practical concern to determine to what extent we can and should adapt our institutions to the needs of the learners.

All of us have at one time or another developed and used formal as well as informal techniques for assessing student reactions to their college experience. We see students in hallways and ask them how things are going for them--we meet them in the cafeteria--we read the student newspaper--we meet with committees of students who represent (theoretically) their colleagues--we develop an intuitive feel for the climate on the campus--sometimes we are right--we develop a feel for the right kind of vibrations--sometimes we are wrong--and it's when we are wrong that we encounter difficulty.

Hence the title, Student Reactions to College.

As you know, the 60's were turbulent years in many American institutions. In 1969, a group of congressmen visited a number of campuses across the country, talking with students to determine for themselves the reasons for the tensions that had been wracking colleges. Their report to the President of the United States contained this statement:

> On campus after campus we found widespread criticism from students who feel unable to communicate with administrators and faculty. They believe that no channel is open to them to make their views known. (Congressional Record, 1969.)

K. Patricia Cross of ETS came to a similar conclusion after a more scholarly review of the literature describing two-year college students. Little was known, she concluded, about how two-year college students felt about their college experiences, what they expected on entering college, how well their expectations were formed, or how their experiences meshed with their expectations. Cross believed these informational gaps were much more serious for students in two-year than in four-year colleges, and more serious for vocationally oriented than for transfer oriented two-year college students.

In response to the need described by Cross and confirmed by the personal observations of the Congressional group, Student Reactions to College was developed for the primary purpose of giving students in community and junior colleges a vehicle for systematically expressing their views about how well their needs were being met by their college experiences. Such a systematic expression of student views was thought to be far superior to the intuitive approach, and would provide the college--its faculty, administrators, trustees, and community supporters--information of considerable value in the day-to-day activities of the college as well as in the long-range planning and conduct of its program.

The enormous changes in college student attitudes and orientations, from the "silent generation" of the 1950's, to the activist protests of the 1960's, to what appears to be a sharp decline in active and violent protests of the 1970's, provide a broad background for viewing less momentous but nevertheless important changes in student views over shorter periods of time. The new clientele bring with them changes in attitudes toward occupational choice, toward modes of study, toward extracurricula activities, and toward other areas of immediate concern. These attitudes can and do change substantially over a period of just a few years, and indeed occasionally from year to year. Programs and activities well suited to a community or junior college population in one year may not be as appropriate a year or two later. While perceptive faculty and staff members frequently sense such changes as they are occurring, the extent and ramifications of the changes may not be known with enough confidence for officials to consider appropriate responses. Information gained from carefully selected samples of student groups, particularly if it is consistent over divergent groups of students, and over a period of time, can give sufficient confirmation to changing student needs to permit colleges to take prompt action in revising outmoded or inconvenient practices, and can provide the impetus for implementing new ones.

In the development of Student Reactions to College, the primary point of view was to ask, "What would students like to say to the faculty and administrators of the college?" The questions, "What would faculty members and administrators like to hear about student views?" was given secondary consideration. Although conflicts between these two points of view were minor, the determination of content in the developmental research was based on

two hypotheses:

1. What the students want to say is the kind of information college faculty and staff are likely to find useful.
2. Questionnaires directed primarily to faculty and administrator interests, with student interests expected to be served automatically if the college staff is given the information it wants, are more numerous.

Therefore, a reversal of that priority seemed desirable, sensible, and indeed essential if students were to give the necessary time, care, and thought.

In constructing the questionnaire, a number of specifications were formulated. These were held to fairly closely, with only minor modifications in response to the views of a large number of students, faculty members, and administrators who were consulted directly in the process of constructing the instrument. The following specifications were set:

1. In serving as a vehicle through which students can provide faculty and administrators with information useful in planning and revising educational programs and services, the questionnaire emphasizes those areas of student concern about which it can realistically be expected that some action can be taken by the college. (I'll return to this later--but it is in this area we tend to fail.)
2. The questionnaire provides information about the collective views of groups of students. Problems associated with the interpretation of individual student responses are avoided, and anonymity of response is provided.

3. Unlike CUES, which incorporated a series of scales, each item in SRC provides useful information independently of other items. Although the responses to several items considered together can provide interpretations broader than those associated with any item individually, the use of scales constructed from a number of items, and representing an abstract underlying construct, is neither necessary nor the primary purpose of the SRC. For example, the item, "The college should retain the present academic calendar," is an item which has inherent value and stands alone without need for grouping.

4. The wording of the items is simple and direct, phrased the way college students describe the issues rather than the way social scientists might. The items approach the issues directly rather than through subtle allusions.

5. The persons responding to the questionnaire are students who have had at least one semester's experience at the college.

6. In order to ensure specific applicability to local situations, flexibility is provided for through an option for individual colleges to add items of local interest. Further flexibility is provided by permitting colleges to select groups of student responses. For example, the responses of students in vocational-technical programs might be compared with responses of transfer students; full-time students' responses with part-time students' responses; etc.

7. Perhaps of greatest importance, the results provided by Student Reactions to College are presented in a manner easily understandable to

college staff members and students without the need for interpretation by researchers, statisticians, methodologists, or psychometrists. The items are intended to be specific enough that possible corrective actions for undesirable situations will be immediately apparent:

What are the Contents of SRC?

The dominant area of content in SRC is concerned with the processes of instruction as experienced by the students. The difficulty of the courses, their appropriateness in relation to student goals, satisfaction with teaching procedures, and faculty relations with students are among the issues related to instruction.

Thirty-seven per cent of the items relate directly to an aspect of the instructional program or to the class preparation activities of the students. Some sample items:

4. This term, my instructors have geared their instruction to the students' interests and abilities.
5. This term, my instructors have been unable to explain something in a way I could understand it.
6. This term, my instructors have respected student points of view different from their own.

Student goals, their educational and occupational decisions, and the planning of their programs constitutes another major content area. The functioning and student use of college counseling services and faculty advisers are included in this group of items, which constitute 8 per cent of the statements. While the first group of statements deals directly with instruction, this group deals with the students' purposes in undertaking that instructio

It should be noted that the questions are not grouped according to such categories, however, but are distributed throughout the instrument with such lead-in phrases as, "This term my instructors have...", "During the present term I have...", "I would like..." or "The college should...".

The third major area is concerned with the administrative affairs of the college as they affect students--the registration process, availability of classes, administrative regulations, acceptability of staff and information. Some examples:

133. This term I have been trapped by rigid drop and add requirements in a course I found I didn't need or want.

134. This term I have been prevented by scheduling problems from taking a course required in my field.

135. This term I have missed a course I needed because it wasn't available

A final, diverse area includes items describing the students' out-of-class activities and problems of housing, transportation, financial support, part-time employment, and other aspects of day-to-day living. Again some examples:

170. The college should leave the control of students' out-of-class activities entirely to the students.

154. The college should cut out unessential but compulsory student costs, such as those for student activities, intercollegiate athletics, the student newspaper, etc.

These four broad areas describe the general content of the questionnaire. They are the areas considered most important by large numbers of students and staff members interviewed in planning for the questionnaire. They are also

areas in which a college has some freedom to act in order to modify an existing situation seen by the students as being undesirable.

As the Regional Accrediting Commission's Draft Report indicates, "If the efforts expended in self-study are to be justified, some kind of action should result."

The Pilot Project

In the spring of 1974, ETS's Community and Junior College Program joined with 20 institutions in an SRC pilot project, preparatory to making SRC available beginning with the 1974-75 academic year. Of the institutions participating, all were publicly supported institutions from the states of Missouri, Maryland, Texas, Illinois, Alabama, California, Michigan, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, New Mexico, Ohio, and Arizona. A total of over 7,500 students participated in the project. The results of that study are now being assessed. The information derived should provide each cooperating institution an understanding of how students view their experiences at that particular college. Taken collectively, the data should give us some general overview of how students in American community colleges view their educational experiences.

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